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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002261

(C O R R E C T E D COPY - CLASSIFICATION)

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: AFTER THE TALIBAN: HIGH EXPECTATIONS IN HELMAND'S NAWA DISTRICT

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Coordinator Hoyt Yee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Joint U.S. Marine and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) operations in Helmand's Nawa District have resulted in visible progress since Operation Khanjar commenced July 2. Helmand Governor Mangal held a well-attended shura July 23. The local market has seen growing numbers of merchants. Plans are in place to introduce a sizable ANSF presence in order to maintain momentum. The district's close proximity and population base near the capital city of Lashkar Gah make it a strategic counter-insurgency anchor. The district's Provincial Council representative recently noted that while security had improved, some prominent residents had yet to return to Nawa because of fears of IEDs on major roads. Marine companies are currently moving into hardened "hold" positions throughout the district. Polling sites will be open on election day. END SUMMARY.

CLEARING OPERATION: SO FAR, SO GOOD

¶2. (C) Marine units, joined by Afghan Army soldiers, spread throughout Nawa District beginning July 2, as part of the larger Operation Khanjar. Taliban attacks were minimal, with reports of fighters moving into the nearby Marjah area -- which has not yet been cleared, but eventually will be. Marine companies continue to patrol key sectors and have begun to establish patrol bases. Nawa's once vacant main bazaar is again a community gathering place, with more shops opening.

SHURA: SECURITY A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

¶3. (U) Governor Mangal led a shura July 23 in Nawa attended by approximately 600-700 residents. He was accompanied by an ANA brigade commander, NDS chief, provincial council representative, and police chief. Several elders and two mullahs spoke to the assembled residents as well, all echoing similar themes: security is a shared responsibility; the joint Marine-ANSF clearing operation provided an opportunity for projects and economic life to return, alongside a persistent security presence; and, the Taliban burned schools and clinics, never building any. The Second Marine Expeditionary Brigade's (2d MEB) Commanding General also reinforced to those gathered the importance of community cooperation with Marine and ANSF units.

PC MEMBER: SOME WILL VOTE, OTHERS NOT

14. (U) Nawa Provincial Council representative Haji Toor Khan told State Rep to 2d MEB that while security had improved, key leaders who had fled Nawa when Taliban were in control remained in Lash. Fears about IEDs along roadways remained their major concern. He said that while some in Nawa would vote in the upcoming election, others would not, adding that Nawa residents were still waiting to see whether the security improvements would last.

RESIDENTS: BETTER SECURITY,
. . . BUT FOR HOW LONG?

15. (U) State Rep visited Nawa over a two-day period in July and met with a number of residents and a local mullah. Most said security had improved, but that the local population remained wary of Taliban reinfiltration. The muliah stressed that Nawa residents "were tired of war" and that the people would participate in shuras "especially if you discuss schools and clinics." (NOTE: A Marine civil affairs unit has begun to make plans to refurbish a centrally located clinic; Helmand's health director has told us that doctors would be ready to staff it. END NOTE)

16. (U) Several elders in the bazaar told State Rep that the duration of the new Marine role in Nawa represented the most important factor for stability, alongside a persistent ANSF presence. Both police and ANA work with Marines in the area in joint fashion, with Marine infantry companies spread throughout priority locations.

KABUL 00002261 002 OF 002

COMMENT

17. (C) The combined ANSF-Marine operation in Nawa has resulted in improved security. The area is strategically located next to Helmand's capital, Lashkar Gah. Taliban fighters have reportedly moved from Nawa -- to avoid direct contact with Marines -- into neighboring Marjah. With baseline security established, the provincial government has an opportunity to establish representation (a district governor is on-site) and begin to deliver basic services. The recent shura bodes well for improved, albeit cautious, confidence among the people. However, the key factor for the war-weary local population will likely remain the overall endurance of Marines and ANSF -- and government officials)- as Taliban forces regroup and increasingly test our initial counter-insurgency success. The long-term "battle" for Nawa has only just begun.

EIKENBERRY